Identifying, Helping, & Referring Students in Distress
Agenda

- Introductions
- Common Concerns
- Indicators of Distress
- How to Help Those in Distress
- Referrals
- Questions
Counselling & Clinical Services

• C&CS team:
  • Psychologists
  • Psychology Interns
  • Mental Health Consultants
  • Psychiatrists

• Services offered:
  • Initial consultations
  • Counselling (individual and group)
  • Drop-In Workshops
  • Faculty and Staff Consultations
  • Outreach & Collaborations
  • Referrals to other resources

Office Hours:
Monday-Friday 8:30 – 4:30 pm
Tues/Wed 8:30 – 7pm

Online resources –
www.mentalhealth.ualberta.ca

SUB 2-600

Satellite Offices:
Engineering
Humanities/Arts
Science
Employee and Family Assistance Program

GSAP

- Homewood Health
  - 780-428-7857
  - [www.homewoodhealth.com/health](http://www.homewoodhealth.com/health)

- StudentCare – Counselling
  - [https://psyvitaliti.ca/](https://psyvitaliti.ca/)

- Private Psychologist – Student Plan covers 80% max $600/year
• Met criteria for mental health or substance abuse disorder:
  • 1/3 Canadians: at some point in their life.
  • 1/10 Canadians: in 12 months prior to survey.
  • 1.2% experience mental AND substance use concurrently in the previous year
  • Highest rate of both were youth aged 15-24.
In 2016, Alberta post secondary students reported experiencing the following in the last 12 months:

- Felt very lonely

65%

In 2016, Alberta post secondary students reported experiencing the following in the last 12 months:

- Felt overwhelming anxiety

63.7%
In 2016, Alberta post secondary students reported experiencing the following in the last 12 months:

- Felt so depressed that it was difficult to function

In 2016, Alberta post secondary students reported experiencing the following in the last 12 months:

- Felt things were hopeless

57.5%

In 2016, Alberta post secondary students reported experiencing the following in the last 12 months:

- Seriously considered suicide

13.1%
Top 3 Presenting Concerns at CCS

- Depression
- Anxiety/Panic
- Social & Relationship Problems
Why identifying distress is important…

- Increasing Pressure
- Feeling Overwhelmed

Escalation
Indicators of Distress

Academic

Emotional

Social

Behavioural
Academic Indicators

- Repeated absences, tardiness
- Missed assignments, appointments, meetings
- Disruptive classroom behaviour, intoxicated in class
- Chronic procrastination, repeated requests for special consideration, neglect of responsibilities
- Drop in grades (deterioration in quality/quantity of work, erratic performance)
- Written work – inappropriate, incoherent or bizarre (violent, morbid, despair, social isolation)
Emotional Indicators

- Emotional outbursts; extreme mood swings
- High levels of anxiety, dependency
- Overt references to suicide, self-harm, or harm to others
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hopelessness, helplessness
- Extreme suspiciousness/paranoia
## Behavioural Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive, demanding, disruptive, or bizarre behaviour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deterioration in personal hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dramatic weight gain/loss</td>
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<td>Seeing or hearing things that are not there</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agitation, restlessness, or hyperactivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excessive Fatigue</td>
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Social Indicators

- Open conflict with instructors, students, staff
- Isolation from other students, highly withdrawn in class
- Significant problems with roommates, friends, family
- Little or no contact with friends or family
How can you help?

Talk to them

Consult

Refer
How to Talk to Someone In Distress
Express Your Concern

- Meet privately
- Express Care
- Be Direct & Honest
- Be Specific
- Ask Open Ended Questions
Empathize & Listen

- Normalize
- Validate
- Allow for Silences
- Empathize without Agreeing or Disagreeing
- Avoid Judgment & Criticism
Know Your Limits

- Avoid Making Promises
- Be Aware & Express Limits to Your Knowledge
- Maintain Boundaries
- Be Mindful of Your Safety
- Consult
Check for Safety

- Look for Signs of Safety Risks
- Ask Directly
- Don’t Promise Confidentiality
How to Ask About Suicide

- Do they have a plan?
- Do they intend to act on it?
- Do they have a timeframe?
Want to learn more?

• **QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer)**
  – community.ualberta.ca/Programs/QPR-Training.aspx

• **Community Helpers**
  – community.ualberta.ca/Programs/CommunityHelpersProgram.aspx

• **ASIST**
  – edmonton.cmha.ca/programs-services/applied-suicide-intervention-training-asist/
University of Alberta – Faculty and Staff Resources

- [https://www.ualberta.ca/provost/dean-of-students/faculty-staff-resources](https://www.ualberta.ca/provost/dean-of-students/faculty-staff-resources)

- Resource Guides:
  - How to help
  - Where to send for Academic Support
  - Responding to a Sexual Assault Disclosure

- “Digest” emails – students, academics, staff
how to help

Many members of the U of A community will experience stressors throughout the year. For most, speaking with someone and feeling understood will be enough. The following six guidelines are a framework on how to listen and communicate with care when assisting someone. The questions in steps two through five can also be useful when checking in with ourselves.

This section is based on the Helping Skills™ content from the Community Helpers Program.

**step 1: State Your Concern**
- State specific behaviours you have witnessed.
- Express your concern and willingness to talk about what they are experiencing.
- Arrange an alternative time and place if either you or the individual do not have adequate time to talk.

Express your concern by saying:
"You look..." "You sound..."
"I heard..." "I saw..."

**step 2: Identify the Problem**
- Listen without judgment and give the person time to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Clarify that you understand the problem correctly by asking open-ended questions, such as, "What I hear you saying is..."

Start the conversation by asking:
"What is happening?"
"How have you been feeling?"

**step 3: Explore Alternatives**
- Explore alternatives and offer suggestions while respecting the individual and their experience.
- Discuss what they see as appropriate action on how to address their situation. The most sustainable action plans are those developed by the individual.

Explore solutions by asking:
"What ideas do you have?"
"Have you thought about..."
"How likely are you to do that?"

**step 4: Consider Outcomes**
- Encourage the individual to consider how their course of action might impact others, including how they might react.

Consider the impact of the solutions by asking:
"What would happen if you did that?"
"What might the impact of these actions be?"
"Is that a problem for anyone else?"

**step 5: Determine What to Do**
- Acknowledge that others in similar situations often feel the same way.
- Establish a sense of hope by offering support and encouragement while reinforcing that change is possible.
- Support them in their decision.

Inquire what the person is going to do by asking:
"What would you like to do?"
"How can I help you move forward with this?"

**step 6: Express Support**
- Suggest and accompany the individual to a helping resource, if desired.
- Inform the individual you will check in with them to see how they are doing.
- Believe what the person is telling you, and don’t promise something that you can’t deliver.

Express support by saying:
"Let me know what happens."
"Let me know if you need me."
Assisting Students in Distress

Understanding the common behavioral indicators of someone in distress can help determine the appropriate level of response. By trusting your instincts and using the indicators listed below, you can help connect the individual to the support they need before their situation escalates.

**Concerning Situations**
Individuals showing signs of concerning behaviors and/or appear to be in moderate distress likely have support options, but may need to be reminded of them.

**Indicators**
- Change in mood and attitude
- Isolating oneself from others
- Altered class participation
- Procrastination on personal commitments or academic assignments
- Slight drop in attendance and grades
- Lack of motivation
- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
- Dramatic weight gain or loss and/or change in appetite and food behaviors
- Heightened levels of stress and anxiety
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Increase in risk-taking behavior

**What to Do**
- Address the individual’s situation empathetically and without judgment using the steps from the “How to Help” section.
- Provide resources and follow up, if required.
- Contact the Helping Individuals At Risk office at 780-492-4372 if the individual’s behavior continues to be of concern.

**Critical Situations**
Individuals showing signs of critical behaviors and/or appear to be in high distress likely need professional support due to the disruptive nature of their concerns. These situations need to be addressed and followed up with, but may not require immediate action.

**Indicators**
- Extreme mood swings, aggression, or other disruptive behavior
- Significant depressive state or denial of emotion
- Acute emotional distress or high levels of anxiety and worry
- Bullying or harassment
- Dominating classroom discussion
- Hostile or sarcastic remarks
- Considerable problems with roommate, partner, friends, and/or family
- Disclosure of self-harm, disordered eating, substance abuse, current or prior sexual assault and/or partner/family violence
- Serious academic concerns (e.g., significant drop in attendance and grades)
- Severe/prolonged illness or injury
- Lack of food, shelter, and/or financial means

**What to Do**
- Listen to the individual and connect them to appropriate support services using the “Quick Referral Guide”.
- Contact the Helping Individuals At Risk office at 780-492-4372 to note concern, establish a follow up plan, and discuss further support for the individual.

**Urgent Situations**
Individuals showing signs of severe behaviors and/or appear to be in imminent harm are in need of immediate attention and intervention by other helping professionals and/or emergency services.

**Indicators**
- Thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviors
- Threats and actions of aggression towards others (e.g., physical, verbal, correspondence)
- Imminent threat or action of serious injury to others
- Serious actions of harassment towards others (e.g., physical, verbal, online)
- Persistence of unwanted/unwanted contact or harassment/bullying
- Physical contact/attack
- Presence of or threat to use a weapon

**What to Do**
- Contact 911.

If unsure who to refer to, contact the Community Social Work Team at 780-492-3342.

Universe of Alberta
Office of the Dean of Students
Counselling & Clinical Services

Location
• 2-600 Students' Union Building (SUB)

Hours
– Monday, Thursday, & Friday: 8 AM - 4:30 PM
– Tuesday & Wednesday: 8 AM - 7 PM

Phone: 780.492.5205

First Visit
• Book an Initial Consultation by phone or in person

https://www.ualberta.ca/current-students/counselling/about-us
Free Drop-in Workshops

Anxiety Management

Addressing Anxious Thoughts
Facing Fears and Gaining Control
Impostor Syndrome

Mood & Wellness

Cultivating Self-Compassion
Happiness: Moving to Wellness
How to Set Healthy Boundaries
Make Stress Your New BFF
The Student Life: Managing Stress
Understanding Depression & Addressing Unhelpful Thinking Patterns

Mindfulness

Introduction to Mindfulness
Yoga for Mental Hygiene
Yoga for Peace of Mind - Mindfulness, Meditation & Motion

*Check website for updated schedule and registration INFO

ualberta.ca/current-students/counselling/workshops
Helping a Student in Distress

• How to help guide

General Interest

• Everything you wanted to know about counselling

Anxiety & Stress

• Panic/Anxiety Attacks
• Social anxiety
• Stress management

Academic

• Psychologists Grad School Survival Guide
• Student self-help booklet
• Test anxiety
• Procrastination

Social

• Assertiveness
• Making small talk

Depression

• Depression coping strategies (short)
• Depression coping strategies (long)

Relationships

• Romantic relationship tips
• Surviving a relationship breakup
• How to Break Up With Someone

Other

• Anger management tips
• Body image
• Grief
• Isolation & loneliness tips
• "Normalizing" your eating
• Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
• Perfectionism
• Self-esteem
• Self harm
• Sleep

ualberta.ca/current-students/counselling/resources
What is ACCESS Open Minds?

ACCESS OM at the University of Alberta is a friendly and caring service looking to improve student wellness and mental health by connecting students to supports, bridging gaps, and providing assistance as long as needed. Our services are part of a nation-wide research initiative that focuses on student wellness & mental health.

We would like to make a difference in how mental health services are provided, and we need your help!

- We are collecting data from first year students (undergraduate & graduate) who are under 25 years old.
- By participating in the research, youth can make a difference in how mental health services are provided on campus as well as across Canada, to young people now and in the future.
- The research involves filling out some surveys and questionnaires and anonymously sharing some of your health care information. All data and information is anonymized.

Connect with us at: accessom@ualberta.ca | SUB 2-300